

DNR Rewards Efficiency in Recycling Programs Through Recycling Efficiency Incentive (REI) Grants

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The Wisconsin DNR's Recycling Efficiency Incentive Grants program (REI) was initiated in June 2003, following a legislative directive in the 2001 Biennial Budget and establishment of a \$1.9 million supplemental recycling grant appropriation. The criteria for grant eligibility address concerns related to the structure and operation of local recycling programs that impact program efficiency and effectiveness.

The REI program offers grants to reward responsible units (RUs) who have made an effort to improve the efficiency of their recycling programs. To be eligible for this grant, one RU must consolidate or enter into a cooperative agreement with at least one other RU. Cooperative agreements must fall into at least one of four recycling categories: collection and transportation of recyclables, sorting of recyclables, comprehensive program planning, or educational efforts.

The REI program has made impressive strides in encouraging greater inter-program cooperation, effectively demonstrating the economic benefits of joint ventures. In addition, three consolidations, involving five RUs, have occurred since the program was initiated. By sharing examples of what has been achieved, it is expected that more RUs will be encouraged to take advantage of this opportunity to improve the efficiency of their program through partnerships with their neighbors.

DNR is tracking progress of REI projects so that others can learn from these experiences. Highlights from projects thus far, through the 2005 grant cycle, include:

Glass Recycling- Adams and Trempealeau counties

Mixed Paper Recycling- Winnebago, Outagamie and Waupaca counties

Plastic Recycling- Pierce and Pepin counties

Light Bulb Recycling- Cities of La Crosse and Onalaska and Vernon County

Educational Outreach- Cities of Racine, Milwaukee, Wauwatosa; Town of Bloomfield; villages of East Troy, Brown Deer, Butler, Genoa City, Menomonee Falls, Sussex; Waukesha County

2004 Recycling Efficiency Grants Summary Report

In 2004, 23 groupings of Wisconsin recycling communities proved that efficiency efforts can lower operating costs as well as provide individual RUs with the wherewithal to carry out operations that normally are unmanageable.

Adams and Trempealeau counties formed a multi-governmental unit consisting of seven small communities. John Staats, Director of Recycling for the South Trempealeau County Solid Waste Commission, informed us that these communities are working on a glass aggregate program in order to find additional

markets for recycled glass. He considers the REI project to be successful because the community, as well as bars and restaurants, are recycling significantly more. Labor costs have dropped and volume has increased due to less separating and more kinds of glass accepted. While aiming to establish and maintain programs, Mr. Staats has many ideas for the future of the program. He's currently working with the State Department of Corrections on a computer collection and recycling program. He also hopes to provide memberships to RUs in small towns that can't cover the expenses alone. Mr. Staats stated, "As you develop, why not do it with another responsible unit... if one responsible unit offers to join another, it makes it easier." For the coming year, he's planning a textile recycling program with Continental and Goodwill. While Mr. Staats has successfully implemented recycling efficiency programs in his area, he does have a problem with REI grants. He believes that the means of distribution on a per capita base is questionable, since 10% of RUs take almost 90% of the grant money.

Winnebago County is running a unique recycling efficiency program of its own. Jennifer Semrau, Recycling Coordinator for Winnebago County, explains that the county serves as a liaison between smaller communities in the county. They draft cooperative agreements for 15 communities and encourage participation. Winnebago County is currently working to educate partner communities on recycling mixed paper. Future plans include a focus on bilingual education, specifically by developing a recycling guide written in Spanish.

Pierce and Pepin counties are cooperating on the collection and transportation of recyclables. Pierce handles Pepin's clean plastic, once it is compacted. Terry Mesch, Recycling Coordinator for Pepin County, reports that the project resulted in lowered costs and boosted revenue, due to a larger volume. Pierce County also cooperated with five counties to bring in a national recycling magic show, which would have been unaffordable for any individual county to produce. Terry is planning a recycling program for businesses featuring waste audits in the coming year.

Outagamie and Waupaca counties are currently working on an educational campaign to increase paper recycling in their counties. Jill Haygood, Recycling Coordinator for Outagamie County, reports that they have developed brochures for schools, press releases and stickers for participants. Ms. Haygood is also working with communities in **Calumet County** to develop an Environmental Resource Guide that echoes Southeastern Wisconsin's Green Pages.

The **cities of La Crosse and Onalaska and Vernon County** are cooperating on a light bulb collection program from businesses. They provide drop-off sites and even offer to pick up larger numbers of used bulbs twice a year. Penny Pierce, former Recycling Coordinator for the City of La Crosse, tells us that in March 2004, forty businesses participated, amassing 20,000 light bulbs, the highest number yet. Ms. Pierce hopes to expand the bulb collection to include more communities in the coming years.

When the **Polk County** RU was not receiving enough materials to keep their materials recovery facility (MRF) operation running, **Burnett and Washburn counties** came to the rescue. All drop-off materials from the three counties go to Polk for larger volumes and consequently a more cost efficient operation. Richard Schneider, Recycling Coordinator for Burnett and Washburn counties, reports that everyone involved in this cooperative effort saves a bundle. For the future, Burnett County plans to continue their cooperative with Polk County, expanding it with a newsletter and education.

The BeSmart Coalition (formerly the Southeastern Wisconsin Waste Reduction Coalition) continues to add new members to its innovative educational partnership. For example, in 2005, the cities of Racine, Milwaukee, Wauwatosa, the Town of Bloomfield, the villages of East Troy, Brown Deer, Butler, Genoa City, Menomonee Falls, Sussex and Waukesha County all joined to provide a wide variety of educational services ranging from the Wisconsin Green Pages to in-school workshops to recycling away from home services. Since all communities face staffing shortfalls, the Coalition allows member communities to obtain recycling and waste reduction services that they otherwise wouldn't be able to afford. Organized by work groups, the BeSmart Coalition has four focus areas, including:

- ☐ Education and outreach
- ☐ Waste reduction and recycling away from home
- ☐ Green pages
- ☐ Special waste

A new program targeted at 4th grade classrooms is being developed for 2005 with work on developing a network of regional self-help centers also under exploration.

2005 Recycling Efficiency Grants Summary Report

Each year the quality of REI grant projects exceeds expectations. During the fourth year of the program (2005 grant cycle), a record number of eligible applicants, 148 RUs, received grant awards. The 2005 applicants represented a 92% increase over eligible applicants from 2004. The RUs involved continue to be very innovative, producing many interesting projects to increase the efficiency of their operations.

Following are just a few examples:

- ☐ Adams, Portage and Waupaca counties collaborated to bring mixed waste glass to one site for use as a road sub-base aggregate;
- ☐ 18 communities in and around Shawano County cooperated to bale and transport materials to a single stream MRF, reducing tipping fees;
- ☐ 18 communities in and around Manitowoc County coordinated all their educational activities through one agency;
- ☐ 10 communities in and around Clark County secured volume pricing efficiency on the collection and transportation of recyclables;
- ☐ 18 communities in and around Calumet County cooperatively produced a waste reduction and recycling guide to increase environmental awareness among the residential and business sectors;
- ☐ Brown County, in collaboration with 10 communities in the county, produced a 16-page education publication and distributed it through a major local newspaper; and
- ☐ Vernon County partnered with 2 communities on glass and fluorescent bulb collection from businesses and residences.

Contact 608/266-2111 or Waste.Materials@dnr.state.wi.us for further information.

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